

THE  
HISTORY  
ATLAS OF  
AFRICA

Samuel Kassule

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## FOREWORD

### MACMILLAN

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The shifting patterns of global politics since the collapse of Soviet influence and the liberation of South Africa have radically repositioned the African continent in contemporary world history. *The History Atlas of Africa* offers a timely background study of this widely neglected subject, presenting African history in a way that reflects Africans' own views.

The atlas explores Africa's human history from the evolution of the first hominids, through the pre-historical ages, the ancient empires, the colonial period, and post-independence, to the contemporary era. Recent archaeological discoveries have shown that the history of "the black people" stretches far back into the remote African past, encompassing the development of agriculture and the Iron Age. More recently, the continent has witnessed migrations, conquests, and occupations by Europeans and Arabs, resulting in the rich mixture of contrasting economic, social, artistic, and religious beliefs and practices that it boasts today. Africa to the north of the Sahara is here contrasted with Africa to the south, the Egyptian civilization with those of Benin and Zimbabwe.

The Roman and Byzantine conquests of North Africa were restricted to the coastal strip between Egypt and Mauretania (Morocco), while the spread of Islam from the Middle East, following the decline of the Byzantines, led to the development of great sub-Saharan trading cities. Long before the arrival of the European colonizers, Arabic scholars, geographers and merchants, such as al Bakri, al Fazari, and Ibn Battuta recorded the wealth and splendor of these cities. This atlas includes studies of these often overlooked pre-European cultures.

The spread of Islam and Arabic divided the continent north and south of the Sahara, and these north-south differences were accentuated by the arrival of European colonizers, the transatlantic slave trade, the nineteenth-century spread of Christianity, and the new directions of trade and politics. African and Swahili civilizations were destroyed, while the American and Caribbean connections forged by the slave trade became the cornerstone of the continent's new historical orientation. African religious, agricultural, and artistic traditions have formed the heritage now enjoyed by the descendants of those transported slaves. The atlas includes studies of the African diaspora throughout the Americas, Europe, and Asia.

Contemporary political conflicts are rooted in Africa's past. The effects of European colonial rule, and of the continent's sometimes arbitrary partition between 1880 and 1914, are here examined. Because the new boundaries often disregarded the politics of the pre-colonial "states," the consequences of partition have continued to haunt post-independence Africa in the form of secessionist conflicts such as those in Uganda, Rwanda, Congo, and Nigeria. In this atlas, the roots of such conflicts in the colonial history of subjugation, collaboration, and resistance are explored.

Post-independence Africa has witnessed the rise and fall of several despots, as well as a range of experiments in multi-party democracy and one-party systems rooted in traditional African political structures. With the disintegration of the Eastern bloc and the multinational visit to Africa in March 1998 by U.S. president Bill Clinton, the continent is assuming a new globally strategic role (one that this book, I hope, will prove an aid to understanding).

Dr. Samuel Kasule

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